



# Historic Property Eligibility Determination

State Historic Preservation Office P.O. Box 176 Jefferson City, Missouri 65102

**Property:** Park Central Square  
Springfield, Missouri  
Project Number: 032-GR-08

**County:** Greene

**Eligibility Assessment:** The property appears to meet the following National Register criteria:

- \_\_\_\_\_ **Criteria A.** Associated with events that have made a significant contribution to the broad patterns of our history.
- \_\_\_\_\_ **Criteria B.** Associated with the lives of significant persons in or past.
- XX **Criteria C.** Embodies the distinctive characteristics of a type, period or method of construction; that represent the work of a master; that possess high artistic values; or that represent a significant and distinguishable entity whose components may lack individual distinction.
- \_\_\_\_\_ **Criteria D.** Has yielded or may be likely to yield information important in history or prehistory.

**Areas of Significance:** Landscape Architecture

## Comments:

Park Central Square is eligible for listing in the National Register of Historic Places under Criteria C as the work of a master in the field of landscape architecture.

As documented in the information submitted by the City, Springfield's square has undergone many changes over the years. It is worth noting that the current Lawrence Halprin design is significant as the only truly designed landscape to occupy the public square space in the City's history. It is also significant that it has existed in its current form for 38 years – one of the longest periods of any configuration in the City's history.

Of particular significance in determining the significance of Park Central Square, however, is its association with landscape designer, Lawrence Halprin. Halprin is recognized as one of the most significant and influential landscape designers of the latter twentieth century. His projects range from designs for rapid transit systems to university campuses, from new cities to civic redevelopment, from large-scale land developments and inner-city parks to small private gardens. Examples are: Sea Ranch on California's central coast, representing the application of town planning principles to an exquisite rural landscape designed with extraordinary sensitivity to the natural environment;

In the 1960s, Lawrence Halprin and Associates were known more for urban rather than suburban landscape projects, as they designed and built Ghirardelli Square (1962-1968) and Embarcadero Plaza (1962-1972), both in San Francisco; Nicollet Mall, Minneapolis (1962-1967); four of Portland's public spaces: Lovejoy Plaza, Pettigrove Park, Auditorium Forecourt, and the Transit Mall (1965-1978); and Freeway Park, Seattle (1970-1974). He was selected by the FDR Memorial Commission in 1974 to design the FDR Memorial.

Park Central Square was designed during one of the most productive periods of Halprin's career. It reflected Halprin's belief that under utilized spaces could be reclaimed and reused for people.

Halprin's talent and expertise has been widely recognized by his peers. Among the honors he has received are the following:

- 1964 AIA Medal for Allied professionals
- 1969 Elected fellow in the ASLA
- 1970 Elected honorary fellow of the Institute of Interior Design
- 1979 Thomas Jefferson Medal in Architecture
- 1979 Gold Medal for Distinguished Achievement awarded by the AIA
- 2002 National Medal of Arts by The President of the United States
- 2002 Friedrich Ludwig von Sckell Golden Ring
- 2003 ASLA Design Medal
- 2005 Michaelangelo Award

Although articles cited in the City's submittal have questioned Halprin's actual involvement in the project and have pointed to George McLaughlin, an architect on the staff of Lawrence Halprin and Associates as the actual designer, 3 factors are worth noting:

1. Contract documents for the project indicate that the project is the work of Lawrence Halprin and Associates. It is reasonable to assume that the work reflected the design concepts of the firm's principal's even if the principal's involvement cannot be precisely determined. The design was executed under Halprin's name and his firm would have been legally responsible for its execution.
2. Design is, by its very nature, a collaborative process. After the fact, it is virtually impossible to parse out who did what or what was the involvement of any individual designer associated with the project. Mr. McLaughlin has stated that he was working under the guidance of Mr. Halprin and was carrying out design decisions based on input and direction from Halprin. Junior architects in a firm frequently carry out much of the work on a project but the final responsibility for the project ultimately rests with the firm's senior designer. It is worth noting that Mr. McLaughlin, in a subsequent letter and interviews, has further clarified his role in the design process and assigns the ultimate design to Mr. Halprin.
3. The design of Park Central Square is totally consistent with other works carried out by Mr. Halprin during the period. It utilizes the same design vocabulary as other Halprin projects and contains similar design elements as are seen in other Halprin designed projects. It embodies a distinctive design philosophy that is consistent with other Halprin designs.

For these reasons, the Park Central Square project must be viewed as the work of Lawrence Halprin.

## Integrity Issues

In order to be eligible for listing in the National Register and to be viewed as "historic", a property must, in addition to meeting National Register criteria, must possess "*integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association*". The City has raised several issues relating to the integrity of Park Central Square. These claims include:

- Deterioration and obsolescence of many of the features of the Square.
- Changes to the configuration and materials of the Square's design
- The belief that the square is only a fragment of a larger design and can't be viewed as a complete and extant resource.

## Obsolescence

It is perhaps understandable that many of the features of the Square may, after 38 years, be deteriorated or in need of upgrades. This is typical of most resources and reflects natural aging as well as deferred maintenance issues. Such deteriorated condition features, while regrettable, do not detract from the integrity of the original design.

### **Changes and Modifications**

The Square has undergone some minor modifications over the years. These include the addition of some additional paving outside and on the edges of the original Square's design, loss of the triangular features opposite the intersection of each road feeding into the Square, alteration to the paving material in the central portion of the Square, loss of original streetscape furniture and replacement with newer incompatible units and loss of original plant material.

While these changes have had an impact on the integrity of the square, these changes are relatively minor. The principle design features of the core of the Square--the geometric terraces, the sunken plaza, the fountain, the pavilion--all remain intact. Loss of original plant materials and original street furniture is a minor alteration and does not significantly impact the design of the Square. One can look at the early birds-eye photograph of the Square that was submitted by the City and note only minor changes in the configuration of the Square today. To a high degree, the Square retains "*integrity of location, design, setting, materials, workmanship, feeling, and association.*"

### **Relationship of the Current Plaza to Larger Conceptual Downtown Plans**

It is apparent that Halprin was involved in conceptual plans for a larger downtown plan that included expansion of the plan outward to the building line of the buildings surrounding the Square. This conceptual plan also included design features to the streets radiating out from the Square.

Portions of this conceptual plan were executed after the construction of the inner square and included the canopies that were added to many of the buildings located on the square. These canopies were removed in recent years leaving only a small portion of the original canopies intact, specifically in the northeast quadrant of the square. The inner square, however, remains essentially intact and is significant as the last extant element of the Halprin design.. The executed plaza is a separate and distinct entity--one that was designed by Halprin and remains substantially unaltered since its time of construction.

### **Criteria G Considerations**

Although Mr. Halprin is still alive, he is quite elderly and is no longer actively practicing his profession. It is, therefore possible to assess his contribution and the body of his work with some objectivity.

Other Missouri resources from the recent past have been listed in the Register prior to their reaching the 50 year mark. These include:

- The Gateway Arch in St. Louis--built in 1965 and listed in 1987 (22 years)
- The BMA Tower in Kansas City--built in 1963 and listed in 2002 (39 years)
- The TWA Headquarters in Kansas City--built in 1956 and listed in 2002 (46 years)
- The American Zinc Building in St. Louis--built in 1967 and listed in 1998 (31 years)
- The TWA Administrative Office Building--built in 1968 and listed in 2007 (39 years)
- The General American Building in St. Louis--built in 1977 and listed in 2008 (31 years)

In several of these cases, the determining factor in the design achieving exceptional significance was the association with a recognized designer of transcendent importance. In the field of landscape design, Lawrence Halprin may rise to that level of importance.